



Agartala, Lilies and lakes

**WHY GO**  
Toss in a dash of East Bengal, whisk in an ounce of West Bengal and stir in the spice of a few of the 10 tribes to dish out Agartala. This low-key capital city of Tripura is a delicious blend of cultures. Outwardly, it may mirror Kolkata (Bengali sounds and signages, cuisine, clothing and the works), but dig about a bit and you'll be bowled over by its fiercely-guarded secrets – heritage monuments, eco-parks and religious structures.  
That this city loves nature is obvious; and not just because of the many 'Save Nature' signs. Our guide tells us the city's

name comes from the many *agar* trees in the area. The drive in from the airport is just a taster of the lushness of the landscape; soak in the woods and ornamental trees on College Tilla (*Wards 15, 16, 17*), which boasts a cluster of educational institutions. Or visit the close-by Maharaja Bir Bikram College – a quaint, colonial building with a lily-studded lake, endearing mynahs and a cricket stadium.  
If you're looking for culture, the tiny 40-year-old Government Museum (00-91-381-326444; PO Chomuhani; 10am-5pm; 1pm-2pm

*lunch break; Rs 2*) is worth a dekho, even if it is slightly ill-maintained. The grandeur of Tripura's ruling dynasty (Manikya) is laid out for you in the form of larger-than-life paintings. The antique tribal jewellery and weaves are also striking.  
Another must-visit is the Ujjayanta Palace, which is currently the State Legislative Assembly of Tripura (5pm-7:30pm; last ticket 6:30pm; adult Rs 5, child Rs 3). This masterpiece of Indo-Saracenic architecture was built in the early 1900s. Let your eyes feast on its carved doors,

giant domes and columns, fountains, pinkish water lilies and coarse but handsome statues. Even the scaffolding cannot detract from its regality.  
A little away from Agartala, other experiences await. Zoom past hamlets to reach Akhauda (3km from Agartala) on the Bangladesh border, and watch the Indian Border Security Force and Bangladesh Rifles march in a crisp, 15-minute border-closing ceremony (5pm; *photographing the uniformed guards is allowed during the march*). It's also worth travelling 14km from the city to the Chaturdash Devata Temple in Old Agartala, with its images

GREAT FROM  
Kolkata



Neermahal is dramatic by night  
Below: Agartala has its own charm in the rains



of 14 goddesses. Plan your trip around the Kharchi Puja in the month of July (chants are in the local Kokborok dialect) but be prepared to brave a crowd.  
Hire a car to visit the 18sqkm Sepahijala Wildlife Sanctuary (Bishalgarh sub-division, NH 44; 24km from Agartala; 8am-4pm; Rs 3 adult, Rs 1 child below five, Rs 8 car, Rs 10 still camera, Rs 50 video camera; closed Fri), home to 400 odd plant species! You can go boating (Rs 5 for 30 minutes, Rs 20 per head in a four-seater, Rs 10 per head in a two-seater) or take the toy train (Rs 5 adult, Rs 3 child). Go off the main track into the woods to

**GO NOW**  
Though it might be overcast, or even rainy, this is a chance to luxuriate in unspoiled greenery.

spot primates in the wild (if you are lucky, you may spot squealing leaf monkeys or 'chasma banar', langurs and macaques). Take a walk in the Sepahijala Botanical Garden or marvel at endangered animals (clouded leopards lazing on branches make the trip worth it) in the zoo (Rs 3 adult, Rs 2 child; Rs 10 still camera, Rs 50 video camera). You could stay the

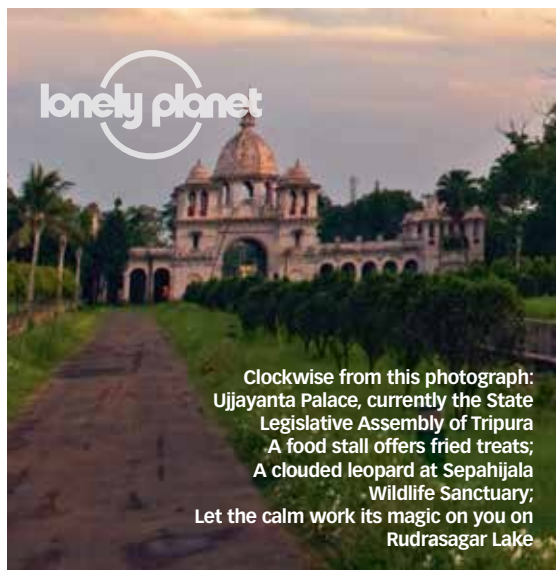
night, but booking a room at the forest department-run, fairytale-like Lake View Resort (contact wildlife warden: 00-91-381-2361225/1227) takes some doing.  
Finally, round off your trip by spending a night at a hotel near the 1930-built Neermahal (53km from Agartala, Melaghar sub-division, West Tripura district), a water palace christened by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. It is a dramatic Mughal structure with a breathtaking water-locked location and an illuminated view (7pm-9pm). Hire a dinghy (Rs 300 per private boat, 5am onwards;

Rs 50 per head on Tripura Tourism motor boat; 9am onwards) to watch the sun play hide-and-seek with the palace. Cajole the boatman to let the vessel float on the placid Rudrasagar Lake through purplish hyacinths and lotuses with spiky leaves. In the silence, spot kingfishers, bronze-winged jacanas, great and little egrets, open-bill storks, whistling ducks, cranes and more. Then return to Agartala to muse over the great adventures you have had in a little-explored state.

MAP: RADHA RAMCHANDRAN



## 5 EASY TRIPS



Clockwise from this photograph:  
Ujjayanta Palace, currently the State  
Legislative Assembly of Tripura  
A food stall offers fried treats;  
A clouded leopard at Sepahijala  
Wildlife Sanctuary;  
Let the calm work its magic on you on  
Rudrasagar Lake



### WHERE TO STAY

#### Sagarmahal Tourist



**Lodge:** With a lovely view of Neermahal and Rudrasagar Lake from almost all the rooms, the serenity is absolutely addictive at this lodge. And you get to sleep on a bed enveloped by a mosquito net! Rooms have to be pre-booked (00-91-381-231-7878/222-5930/3893; [tripuratourism.in](http://tripuratourism.in); Tourism Development Corporation Limited, Swetmahal, Near Rudrasagar Lake, Melaghar; Rs 350 onwards).

#### Hotel Rajasri:

An inconspicuous place with an undulating garden, parking area and a decent restaurant. Its guesthouse-like rooms are inexpensive and comfy (00-91-381-2201034/2310125; Opposite Governor House, Agartala; Rs 500 onwards).

**Ginger:** This is an ultra-mod, self-service hotel with sparse but clean amenities – cosy beds, decent bathrooms, toiletries-vending machine, room service, buffet options, travel desk... (00-91-381-230-3333; [gingerhotels.com](http://gingerhotels.com); Khejur Bagan, Airport Road, Agartala; Rs 1,500 onwards).

### WHAT TO EAT

Try the *poda ilish* (fish from River Padma) and *pabda jhal* (spicy fish curry) for Rs 150 at **Shankar Hotel** (Netaji Bose Road, near Gol Bazar). Vegetarians can dig into *dal*, *aloo bhaja* (crunchy potatoes), *dheras bhaja* (stir-fried okra with green chillies) and *saag* for Rs 10 to Rs 30 a dish. Street food – *samosas*, egg chops and *chaat* (Rs 10 onwards) – is tasty but oily.



### SHOPPING

Agartala offers great hand-made stuff – handloom textiles (Rs 300 onwards for a *ria-paanchra* – wrap skirt-and-stole set), cane furniture (Rs 200 onwards) and wooden objets d'art (Rs 50 onwards). Other must-buys



### FACT SHEET

#### Getting There

**Closest metro:** Kolkata (1615km from Agartala via Guwahati). Driving down is not really the best option.

#### Closest railhead:

Agartala/Badharghat (8km from Agartala). Rent a private vehicle for about Rs 150 to the city centre.

#### Closest airport:

Singerbhil Airport, Agartala (12km). Indigo, JetLite, JetKconnect, Kingfisher, Air

include woollen jackets and shawls (Rs 200 onwards). **Barnali Handicrafts** (VIP Road, en route to the airport) stocks drool-worthy items; no bargaining.

India and Spice Jet fly from Kolkata to Agartala. Return economy fares start at Rs 4,000. A pre-paid taxi from the airport to the city centre should cost around Rs 225.

#### Getting Around

Rent a vehicle to explore the town and nearby areas (Rs 400 to Rs 700 a day). Public transport is limited to buses (crowded, but exciting) and auto-rickshaws (sharing one helps save dough!). Knowing a few words of Bengali helps.



### MEDICAL AID

Chemists are few and far between, so carry a first-aid kit. The city has a moderately-equipped hospital

(Agartala Hospital & Research Centre, 9A, Mantribari Road), but one has to fly to Kolkata in case of an emergency.

### SAFETY

Agartala is largely safe. Drive cautiously on bumpy roads crowded with cattle.

### WHAT TO PACK

Insect repellent, sun block, hats and binoculars are vital. Rain gear, forest-friendly clothes (no bright colours) and comfy shoes are musts.



### CLEAN LOO GUIDE

In Agartala, most cafes and hotels have okay loos. If you're driving long distances, use hotel loos. Carry toilet paper and soap.

